LIME CANYON WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

1. THE STUDY AREA - 34,680 acres

Lime Canyon Wilderness Study Area (WSA) (NV-050-231) is located in the Overton Arm region, near Lake Mead, northwest of Gold Butte in eastern Clark County, Nevada. The study area includes 34,680 acres of public land and surrounds 838 acres of patented mining claims. The WSA has a generally elongated shape that is north-south oriented. It is about 13 miles long and varies between three and seven miles wide. Lake Mead National Recreation Area (LMNRA) borders the WSA on the west and its boundary is the western boundary of the WSA. Gold Butte Wash and the Old Gold Butte Road is the eastern boundary. Quail Spring Wash Road is the southern boundary for approximately 2.5 miles before the boundary turns down a major wash north of Mocking Bird Spring.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE - 13,895 acres recommended for wilderness
20,785 acres recommended for nonwilderness

The recommendation for this WSA is to designate approximately 13,895 acres as wilderness and release approximately 20,785 acres for uses other than wilderness. The central portion of the WSA is recommended for wilderness because of high quality naturalness, outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation, and the lack of conflicts with other actual or potential users of the area.

Topographically diverse, the recommended area consists of alluvial and badlands formations, a hogback like limestone ridge, deep rock drainages, and wide sandy washes. Remoteness and topographic diversity of the area coupled with the adjacent undeveloped lands to the east, ensures outstanding solitude opportunities of the highest quality.

Designation of the area recommended for wilderness would expand the spectrum of primitive recreational opportunities for residents and visitors within the southern Nevada region. Pristine scenic vistas would also be preserved. Popular recreation activities such as sightseeing, photography, hiking, and backpacking would be enjoyed within an expansive primitive setting. Wilderness designation will preserve an undisturbed area of ecological interest, providing educational and scientific information. A variety of wildlife inhabit the area and the potential for identifying prehistoric cultural sites exists. Three major faults cross the area and make interesting geologic features.

Inaccessibility of the adjacent LMNRA land and rugged terrain provide natural, physical barriers to vehicular access. Remoteness of the area, demanding topography, and easily recognizable boundaries would enhance manageability of the area as wilderness.

Conflicts with other resource uses of the lands recommended for designation are limited. High volume-low value commodities, such as limestone, dolomite, and sand and gravel would not be mined in the area because of the distance to market and the availability of similar resources in the region. Development of gypsum resources and exploration for energy resources is projected to occur on lands adjacent to the area recommended for wilderness. Projected activity would indirectly conflict with opportunities for solitude along the recommended area's eastern boundary. No other resource conflicts are projected for the area.

The 20,785 acres of public land, not recommended for wilderness, completely surrounds the land recommended for wilderness on all sides except for the border contiguous with the LMNRA. Three parcels of patented land are within the area not recommended for wilderness.

Mineral development is projected to occur within the area on three patented mining claims. Development of

minerals would require access into the claims, across public land. Development of minerals within the claims would negatively influence wilderness values on the surrounding public land not recommended for wilderness. Exploratory drilling of one oil and gas well is projected to occur along the WSA's eastern border.

Not designating 20,785 acres of public land for wilderness would enhance management of the area by eliminating conflicts with potential development of access to private land, mineral development, and oil and gas exploration activities.

Lands not recommended for wilderness designation would be negatively impacted by any activity occurring on the patented mining claims. Not recommending these areas for wilderness emphasizes maintaining access for motorized recreational activities, such as OHV use.

Over the long-term, naturalness values and opportunities for solitude within those lands not recommended for wilderness would be diminished by increased motorized recreational use and mineral and energy exploration and development. Desert tortoise (Gopherus agassizi), golden bear poppy (Arctomecon california), and gila monster (Heloderma suspectum), special features identified in the area, would not receive the added protection afforded from wilderness designation.

3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS

A. Naturalness: The WSA is primarily natural. It consists of small, rugged drainages, gently rolling hills, two paralleling ridges, a narrow canyon and several wide, sandy washes. The most pristine portion of the study area occurs in the central portion along the ridges and in the canyons. There are no man-made intrusions in this area.

Along the boundaries and lower portions of the WSA, there are several intrusions. Eight ways extend into the study area for a total of 12.7 miles. The longest occurs across the bajada and wide washes in the southwest corner of the study area. There are three short allotment fences, one of which is a gap fence that crosses the mouth of Lime Canyon. Two bird guzzlers and an earthen reservoir are found in the southern and eastern fringes of the WSA.

B. Solitude: Within the area recommended for wilderness designation outstanding opportunities for solitude exist. Excellent topographic screening exists due to the large diversity of topography which ranges from small, rugged drainages to gently rolling hills. Two paralleling ridges extend the length of the WSA to the narrow canyon and several wide washes on the edge of the unit. The central and northern portions (approximately 10,000 acres) provide maximum topographic screening and secluded areas where outstanding opportunities for solitude occur. The most prominent secluded area occurs along Lime Ridge, which runs the length of the WSA. Excellent opportunities also exist in Lime Canyon.

Vegetation within the unit is typical of the Mojave Desert, including cactus, creosote bush, annual grasses, scattered communities of Joshua trees and yucca plants. Low growing vegetation provides nominal screening, except along the eastern boundary where intermittent stands of Joshua provide better screening.

C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation: There are numerous opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreational activities, including day hikes, backpacking, nature study, hunting and photography. Outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation occur mostly in the central portion of the study area along major ridges, canyons, drainages and rolling hills. The greatest variety of topography, wildlife and points of interest are located within this portion of the WSA.

D. Special Features: Lime Ridge and Lime Canyon are of unique scenic and geologic quality resulting from faulting activity.

The desert tortoise (Gopherus agassizii), listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a threatened species on April 2, 1990, has been identified within the WSA.

4. MANAGEABILITY

The entire WSA is not reasonably manageable as wilderness. Management of vehicular access along the southern and eastern portions of the WSA due to accessibility and limited physical impediments is a significant concern. The 838 acres of patented mining claims within the interior of the WSA and access to those claims is a concern.

The 13,895 acre portion of the WSA recommended for wilderness designation is easily managed as wilderness. The patented mining claims are external to this area.

Five pre-FLPMA load claims are located within the WSA. Valid existing rights are uncertain at this time. There are no known post-FLPMA mining claims within the WSA.

5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES

The entire WSA has moderate potential for nonmetallic minerals (gypsum). Although there is abundant deposits of limestone and dolomite, they have low development potential. Similar deposits closer to a market make these deposits of lower value. The Lime Canyon WSA is considered to have low favorability for the occurrence of energy resources.

6. SUMMARY OF WSA SPECIFIC COMMENTS

In 1986, the area was reinstated in the wilderness study process as a result of an April 1985 decision in Sierra Club vs Watt concerning certain lands that were deleted from wilderness review in 1982 and 1983. As a result of the court case, the area was reinventoried to document wilderness characteristics.

Two public hearings were held during the public review period on the Draft EIS. The first was in Las Vegas, Nevada, on August 3, 1988. Oral statements were presented by 22 people. Six oral statements were presented at the second hearing at Reno, Nevada on August 4, 1988. One of the oral comments supported the Preferred Alternative (Partial Wilderness) for the Lime Canyon WSA. None of the other comments mentioned this WSA.

Of the 36 written comments, eight supported the preferred alternative and none specifically recommended another alternative for this WSA. The subjects of the comments were mineral potential, race courses, designation of adjacent lands as wilderness, watershed and wildlife habitat.

No comments were received from Clark County.

In a letter from the Clearinghouse of the State of Nevada, dated September 7, 1988, the Director of the Clearinghouse said, "...the State concurs with the recommendation presented in the document." The document referred to is the Draft Nevada Contiguous Lands Wilderness EIS and the recommendation is partial wilderness.